



Parallel Women Characters and Femininity in Durrell's and Kazantzakis's Work

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Abstract: In her article "Parallel Women Characters and Femininity in Durrell's and Kazantzakis's Work" Helena González-Vaquerizo discusses Nikos Kazantzakis's and Lawrence Durrell's fiction with regard their narration of women protagonists. Further, considering both writers' role in a modernist literature and issues of gender identity, González-Vaquerizo examines the special relationship women have with nature. For both writers, the female and the feminine seem to be the pagan descendant of a powerful goddess and women's carnality is seen as key to man's spiritual experience. González-Vaquerizo posits that a comparative approach to Durrell and Kazantzakis both with regard to their biographies and their novels can change our stereotypes concerning gender identity and the role of women in both author's work and life showing unexpected parallels between their women characters.

Helena GONZÁLEZ-VAQUERIZO

Parallel Women Characters and Femininity in Durrell's and Kazantzakis's Work

Lawrence Durrell (1912-1990) and Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957) were contemporaries and more importantly, they lived somewhat parallel lives. The former was an expatriate British writer and the later a Cretan author who lived most of his life away from Greece. They both considered themselves first of all poets, although they both became important novelists. Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* and Kazantzakis's *Zorba the Greek* are two well-known examples. They both made a living out of journalism and travel writing and in their lives they had many relationships with women. By "parallel" in Durrell's and Kazantzakis's work and lives I mean a side-by-side and having the same distance between them and occurring or existing at the same time or in a similar way. Thus, parallel does not mean the same nor equal, but it does mean similar on different levels.

Based on above notions, in the study at hand I examine parallels in Durrell's and Kazantzakis's *Weltanschauung*, their conception of the world, their search for synthesis and its implications in the understanding of man-woman relationships in the context of the Mediterranean and Eastern background with its paganism and spirituality, and Durrell's and Kazantzakis's similar understanding of art and life. Durrell believed that a free woman will lead man into a new age since free individuals are the only ones capable of synthesis. This is elaborated on by James Nichols in *The Stronger Sex*, a study on women in Durrell's novels. Kazantzakis, who spent most of his life struggling to reach the synthesis of opposite forces also believed in a similar world view. Durrell considered that woman is the centre of experience: she is man's teacher and not his student. She is superior to him and the hope of civilization. For Kazantzakis woman was something different from man, but it does not mean she is inferior or superior, but she was neither his equal. Both writers shared the Mediterranean and the Orient (on Durrell and Orientalism, see, e.g., Gifford

<<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1036>>). As Nichols states in his book, Durrell "came to assert and defend the materialism of the classical Mediterranean world ... In all his novels, Durrell sees the body as equal, if not superior, to the spirit" (13). In Nichols's analysis we can almost hear Kazantzakis's Zorba telling his boss that he makes a mistake searching for life in books and not in the real world. For Zorba, as for Durrell, knowledge resides within the body and must be discovered there. Kazantzakis knew this, felt it, but he also feared it. The truths of flesh, sexuality, and women scared him and he sought refuge in Buddhism and spirituality.

Buddhism was for Kazantzakis what India was for Durrell. Durrell was raised in India and lived in many different countries and both writers spent long periods on islands: Kazantzakis in Crete, Naxos, and Aegina and Durrell in Corfu, Cyprus, and Rhodes. On the one hand, they shared the natural environment in which they grew up mixed with the cosmopolitanism they acquired during the course of their lives. On the other hand, their background provides them with a particular understanding of the world: Eastern duality, a duality which does, however, fit in with their shared Mediterranean pagan world. Nichols posits that "The unity of all creation is key to both the classical world and the supposed mysticism of the Eastern world" (26) and this unity is also key to Kazantzakis's and Durrell's parallel thoughts we find in their texts. Durrell talked of a Tibetan mentality and Kazantzakis of an Occidental mind and an African heart and these parallels are shown in their conception of art and life. For them, art and life are equal realities, mirror imitations of each other: "old age is a false dream and Death but fantasy, / all playthings of the brain and the soul's affectations, / all but a mistral's blast that blows the temple wide; / the dream was lightly dreamt and thus the earth was made" (Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey* 65-68). Kazantzakis believed in the power of imagination to create the world and acknowledged women fertile role while Durrell went on further to postulate that woman is creative essence.

In order to summarize their parallel *Weltanschauung* I refer three of Nichols's ideas. According to him, Durrell's paganism asserts that "1) the tragedy of human experience is neither good nor evil, but merely inevitable; 2) the separation of flesh and spirit is false and destructive of human happiness, and 3) pure freedom, either physical or psychological, is an illusion that, once recognized, paradoxically assures its own reality" (30). That the tragedy of human experience is neither good nor evil, but merely inevitable to Kazantzakis is clear: when asked if he was for or against the

war, he answered he was neither for nor against as he was neither for nor against earthquakes (Kazantzakis, *Ταξιδεύοντας. Ισπανία* 146). That the separation of flesh and spirit was for Kazantzakis false and destructive of human happiness is also relevant: Kazantzakis was concerned with the way matter turns into spirit, a process he called transmutation — μεταστροφή (*metousiōsē*) — driven by Bergsonian and Christian thought. Finally, Kazantzakis's aim was to save himself from salvation. Durrell's verse in the play *Sappho* "Freedom, Freedom, prison of the free" (Durrell, *Sappho* 69) corresponds to Kazantzakis's "We must save ourselves from salvation" (*Report* 491).

Kazantzakis considered it man's duty to "resist every temptation to terminate the journey prematurely at stations that appear to be the end but are not really the end (the true end being Nada) [and that] we must love all things and stick to none" (Bien 544). One sticks easily to ideas and in that sense we can recall Durrell's four M-s: monotheism, messianism, monogamy, and materialism, but it is even easier to stick to women and this was a leitmotiv in Kazantzakis's writing. Durrell and Kazantzakis shared the epoch in which they lived: while Kazantzakis was older, they had many common influences, readings, and interests and they both conceived art as a means of giving sense and structure to the chaos of existence: this was one of the fundamental concerns of Modernism, a movement to which Kazantzakis did, in fact, belong (see Beaton). And they also shared their roots in classicism and mysticism. At this point two questions arise: Did they know each other? Did they read one another? If Kazantzakis did, he would not confess to having done so. He seldom mentioned any of his contemporaries or acknowledged them as influences. He had a good dose of megalomania and wanted only to be equated with the big names of the past. I think that because Durrell was well known, it is likely that Kazantzakis would have read some of his books, especially those concerning Greece.

In contrast, there are some references in Durrell's texts on Kazantzakis. For example, Durrell mentions *The Odyssey*: "The great journey of Odysseus in the poem by Kazantzakis takes on a heroic and semi-mythical flavour, as if it were an ancient chronicle or a short of collective poem" (*Greek Islands* 41). He also refers to Kazantzakis as "the most representative Cretan mind of today, expressing strange yearnings for mystical revelation, and a stranger belief in the heroic future of man" and refers to Zorba as "a marvellous evocation of a landscape, and a sketch of a temperament as validly Greek as that of Odysseus himself" (*Greek Islands* 83). Although Kazantzakis wanted all humans to be equal, women remained a mystery to him. He loved and respected, but sometimes did not understand the women in his life. Nevertheless, he made psychological portraits of them in his writing. However, next to those portraits the typical clichés of his time can be found: women are incapable of spiritual and intellectual aspirations, their nature links them to earth and maternity and this is why they embody a danger for the male whose purpose is domination. All these prejudices were tinged by the years and the relationships with women (and men) who escaped from such simplicity.

In Kazantzakis's work, women appear either as a "helper" or as the antagonist fulfilling the male character, the hero. She receives the sexual desire of man, a desire that becomes a problem for most heroes in Kazantzakis's texts: "There is no dominant heroine or female protagonist in any of his works, because passivity, inactivity, weakness, gentility, femininity, would corrode the tenacious spirit and fiber of such heroes as Zorba, Captain Michales, Captain Polyxigis, Father Yanaros, Papa Fotis, Odysseus, and even his saintly Francis of Assisi" (Poulakidas 177). In Kazantzakis's travel writing, for instance, we find the maternal Spaniards, the dangerous feminine beauty of the Peloponnesian landscape and the mystery of the Japanese woman, but rarely the portrait of an individual woman. However, I believe that there are strong women in Kazantzakis's work, women who often threaten their incomplete male counterparts, but who can also be the means of achieving the synthesis and completeness of the couple.

The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel was written by Kazantzakis between 1924 and 1938 and was first published in English in 1957 in Kimon Friar's translation. The main character in this long poem of thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three lines is Odysseus. The second character in is a woman, Helen of Troy. She flees away from Sparta with the hero, but this time she does it willingly and is not abducted as she was by Paris when she was younger (*The Odyssey* 4, 1142-45). The reasons which lead her to leave Menelaus are easily understood: he has become old and weak and she is encouraged by his weakness, takes the active role, and turns into the "male." In Crete

she becomes Odysseus's accomplice to destroy the decadent kingdom of Idomeneus and afterwards she decides to remain there. She becomes pregnant from a blonde barbarian whose blood will mix with her classical spirit giving birth to a new race. For Odysseus she embodies spiritual love: "But he had never longed to embrace lascivious Helen, / for this seductress drew him far from carnal wars / to the high valor of the mind, the peaks of passion ... beyond the raptures of love's spreading thighs, beyond the flesh's shame, its sticky, slimy kisses" (*The Odyssey* 3, 670-74). However, she is still the most beautiful woman and a very sensual one at that. There is, indeed, an image of lesbian love between Helen and Krino, the younger princess of Crete, and a maiden. Friar describes this as follows: "Krino has been strangely drawn by Helen's beauty; the two women kiss and caress each other in the burning sun until Idomeneus, enraged by jealousy, orders Krino to play with the fiercest bull of all, who has secretly been fed irritating and intoxicating herbs. Although she knows that she is going to her death, Krino plays acrobatically with the bull, is suddenly gored, tossed high in the air, then falls impaled on the double-ax standard of the Bull-God" (785). This androgynous — and unfortunate — maiden called Krino (i.e., Lily) is actually a Knossian princess who plays with the bull can only be the "Princess of the Lilies" from the famous palace fresco. This use of the archaeological site as something more than a scenario is an example of a pattern found in Kazantzakis's epic.

Helen is depicted as an intelligent, strong, and independent woman who is attracted to other women. Durrell describes several homosexual pairs in his novels and they are all failed relationships, just as this one is. Clea is one of those women with lesbian inclinations, while Justine and Livia are both androgynous figures like Krino (see Nichols 71, 83). Clea is also a distant woman of overwhelming beauty and a friend and confessor to men like Darley, just as Helen is to Odysseus. And like Justine, the friendship with her "seemed so much more dangerous than a love founded in sexual attraction" (Durrell, *The Alexandria* 28). Next to Krino we find her sister Phida (Serpent), who was Krino's mate in an early work by Kazantzakis, *Serpent and Lily*. Phida is "the eldest daughter of the king, who hates her father's decadent realm and plans an uprising with the slaves and her group of dedicated women, the Rebels" (Friar 784). She is, no doubt, a strong woman, a fighter. A similar feminine character is in *The Odyssey*: the revolutionary Rala in Egypt, a young Jewess resembling Rahel Lipstein, a friend (and lover) of Kazantzakis whom he met in Vienna in the 1920s and by whose communism appealed to Kazantzakis. If change is going to happen, Kazantzakis seems to tell us, it will be women who force it. This appears in Durrell's work, too: "male lovers most often must be seduced into action by the Justines and Livias around them" (Nichols 54). Thus I posit that Kazantzakis's fictional women are not as secondary as it may first seem and that in characters like Helen, Krino, Phida, or Rala we have a tribute to the real women whom he loved and admired. Opposed to Krino and Phida there is a third sister, the princess Diktena. When Odysseus and his crew first reach the palace they "find it being decked with lilies and palms by the Serpent Sisters, priestesses of Mother Earth. Amid leopards and her three Negro lovers, Diktena appears for a moment, the second daughter of the king, the priestess of the holy harlots" (Friar 784).

Diktena acts as a new Ariadne in the poem: her name comes from Mount Dikte in Crete and it means "net." A net is made of thread, like that of Ariadne and is a trap used to fish and haunt. Animals are haunted and men too. Like the mythical character, she will lead the hero to the mystery of the island, to the centre of a fertility ritual, and she will help him kill the beast inside (in this case her own father, Idomeneus). She will leave her native land with him and, like Ariadne, she will soon be abandoned while she sleeps (see González-Vaquerizo <<http://www.ucm.es/info/amaltea/revista/num1/gvaquerizo.pdf>>). In contrast to her mythical predecessor, Diktena assumes an active role in seducing the foreigner and does not regret the situation. Left in an Egyptian harbour, she wakes up and watching the many strong sailors around her, she smiles. She is abandoned by her lover, but she does not care. After her lover made love to her, he leaves her "For the strong sex and the love relationship are perfect freedom" (Nichols 57). Further, there are several parallels for Diktena among Durrell's women. She is the harlot and thus resembles Melissa, although the latter has a more likely parallel in Mary Magdalene, while the former is a seductress, a mystery, and in that sense closer to Justine: "Like Ariadne, Justine teaches Darley how to navigate the labyrinth which is Alexandria. In return she is abandoned by him"

(Nichols 74). As a controlling agent in her relationship with Odysseus, Diktena is parallel both to Justine and Livia "who use their men and leave them. They seem to have no commitment to anything but their own pleasure" (Nichols 77). Like Livia, she is irresistible to men, but she is "an emotional and sexual psychic dead end as well. They must leave her and go on" (Nichols 84). There are, therefore, several kinds of women in *The Odyssey*: domestic (Penelope), sensual (Calypso), Free (Helen), given to a cause (Rala, Phida), sacred prostitute (Diktena), and sacred virgin (Krino) (see Holliday). The women in the novels of Kazantzakis respond to similar characters as those seen on his epic.

Kazantzakis wrote that "Zorba taught me to love life and not fear death" (*Report* 6). Zorba embodies the healthy pagan world: life, joy, carnality and he is life without guilt, pure nature. The protagonist — the "boss," a half-English half-Greek writer — is a spectator fearful of life and women. While Zorba will have an affair with Madame Hortanse which gives sense to the last days of her life, the writer will, after much hesitation, sleep with a beautiful widow of the town. Sex with Hortanse is an act of generosity from Zorba, which the boss is incapable of achieving with the widow. They cry, laugh, and pretend to love each other and she dies next to him. The writer in Durrell's novel is like the abstract philosopher who "cannot understand the sympathy of flesh. It is a lesson that Durrell's women, finally, do not allow their men to forget" (Nichols 42). This reminds us of the wise advice that an old Muslim gives Zorba: "If a woman sleeps alone it puts a shame on all men. God has a very big heart, but there is one sin He will not forgive. If a woman calls a man to her bed and he will not go" (110).

Freedom or Death is probably the most interesting novel for gender questions that Kazantzakis has written. In her article entitled "Gender and Modernity in the Work of Hesse and Kazantzakis" Evi Petropoulou argues that in Kazantzakis's novels, as a norm, women succumb to the will of man. But the articulation of concrete female identity such as in the character of Eminé in *Freedom or Death* fails to conform to this norm: "Eminé dominates by succumbing to man's will, but without casting off her femininity. She is the absolute female by "being" a man (like Justine). She possesses male qualities and immoral thought — that is, immoral in the context of the mores in place — which are manifest in her sexual desires and practices ... Because she assumes a subject position ... she desires the man, whom she chooses and who henceforth becomes the object. Once he falls into her construction of love, he becomes undesirable for her" (Petropoulou <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1065>>). I argue that he becomes incomplete. Her husband Nouri-Bey, for instance, gets seriously injured in his genitals in his duel with Manousakas. The same loss of masculinity is seen in some of Durrell's male characters: Blandford is metaphorically castrated by Constance (*The Avignon* 169-70) and Julian, in *The Revolt*, also becomes impotent. In Kazantzakis's novel Eminé chooses to be baptized with the Christian name Helen. Far from coincidence, her name speaks of the kind of woman who defends her own identity by sexual self-assertion.

In Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation of Christ* we read that "We are not men, to have need of another, an eternal life; we are women, and for us one moment with the man we love is everlasting Paradise, one moment far from the man we love is everlasting hell. It is here on earth that we women love our eternity" (353). The woman talking is Mary Magdalene, a prostitute. Like Melissa, she has the compassion and readiness to sacrifice which incomplete males around them need and like Mary Magdalene she also assumes solitude. A prostitute possess the gift of "charity," she gives herself profoundly, while the men in her life can only take from her and this makes her a superior to him for "She has something to give ... She is the productive one" (Nichols 64-65). She demands nothing from the insecure men around her. In Mary Magdalene's case the incomplete man, however heretic this may sound, is Jesus. The "incomplete male" seems to be a recurrent character in both writers. Durrell's fictional women are stronger than males and the writers and alter egos of the author are willing to learn from and to love women regardless of whether this makes them dependent on them. In contrast, Kazantzakis's women characters, when they are stronger than men, weaken them, feminize them and get masculinized in turn. Men do not realize how much they can learn from women and so fight against them. But this proves to be a mistake for both women and men lose in this battle. The typical male is "a man profoundly insecure, bound to the past, ignorant of the value of other human beings, truly incapable of independent action, and equally unable to

assert a humane, personal value system independent of the bias and prejudices of his culture" (Nichols 101). This may be said of Julian, but also describes a typical Kazantzakian hero such as Captain Michalis.

Following my above argumentation, it is clear that the role of the individual women in Kazantzakis's fiction is not that of subordination as has been usually argued (see, e.g., Alexiou; Armeni, Iatropoulou-Theocharidou, Nikitopoulou; Poulakidas; Rosenthal-Kamarinea; Stamatios). While Kazantzakis is a misogynist when it comes to the women, he is also a misanthropist when it comes to humankind as a whole. While Kazantzakis's individual women are narrated as lovers, wives, or mothers, according to their relation or function to men they can be considered as domestic, sensual, free, given to a cause, sacred prostitutes or sacred virgins. Most of these functions can also be found in Durrell's novels, but here I pay attention to the nurturing female, the woman as a goddess and the sacred prostitute since the special relationship that women maintain with nature in both authors is remarkable.

In *The Odyssey* Diktena represents the Great Mother of Cretan religion, Mother Earth. She is a personification of the Hunter, the Mycenaean-Minoan *πότνια θερῶν* (*potnia therōn*). Together with her two sisters, Phida and Krino, she embodies the various attributes of the pagan deity. She has many lovers, like Justine "But" as Clea would say "to call her nymphomaniac... takes away all her mythical substance. Like all amoral people, she verges on the Goddess" (Durrell, *The Alexandria* 77). Also Benedicta in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is a nurturing mother and mothers are the most enduring women in Durrell's imagination and fiction (Nichols 121-25). For woman, fecundity is, no doubt, her mystery and her power. With regards to Kazantzakis, we have seen Helen's case in *The Odyssey*. If the female body is sacred as it is in pagan thought, "Any denial of the body and its needs is a profoundly false virtue" (Nichols 112). Indeed, Christian principles are contrary to life. Thus Durrell's women live beyond them. In Kazantzakis's work every woman who tries to escape from her nature (and thus from life) fails, like the widow in *Zorba*, while the women who accept the carnality of their spirits succeed like Helen, Diktena, and even Mary Magdalene. As for Eminé, who behaves as a man, is a failed woman, just like Justine. Durrell's women are free and free men. What is more, they free men from the "awful, life-denying, pseudo-ascetic world of Christian false virtue and spiritual goodness" (Nichols 47) and Kazantzakis's women become independent beings by assuming one of their functions in regard to men: prostitutes, wives, saints, etc.

All of Durrell's women are faces of the same ancestral Goddess. Melissa, for instance "resembled one of those ancient goddesses in that her attributes proliferated through her life" (*The Alexandria* 136). They all represent a mystery and the mystery is that of their fecundity. Kazantzakis acknowledged women fertile role and believed in the power of imagination to create the world, but Durrell went further to narrate that women are the creative essence. Biography is always needed to understand the human being and this is even more the case when it comes to writers like Kazantzakis and Durrell. We would never imagine their real life relationship with women only by reading their novels. So, biography in this case is a means of explaining the art work. As Richard Pine claims "Durrell's writing was aligned in such a curious way with his affective life" (55). In fact, neither authors' biographies match their work and there is a kind of chiasmus between life and work in the two writers' novels: Kazantzakis treated his women kindly in life and badly in his work and Durrell, who may have abused and may have had an incestuous relationship with his sister elevated them in his work (Nichols 9). Durrell's fictional women are great creatures and the stronger gender. But women in everyday life were often mistreated by him. It is said that "Durrell drank heavily a good part of his life, and it is incontestable that he could be intensely psychologically cruel and brutal to those around him" (Nichols 19). In contrast, Kazantzakis was extremely tender to others and harsh only to himself. He first conceived women as weak and docile, just the way the women in his family might have been.

While Durrell did not think of his wife Nancy as an intellectual equal, Kazantzakis encouraged both of his wives, Galatea and Eleni, to write. He did not consider women to be intellectual inferiors. It was a young girl, for instance, who first introduced him to Nietzsche's philosophy. As for Durrell, "Justine was a walking abstract of the writers and the thinkers whom she had loved and admired — but what clever woman is more?" (*The Alexandria* 164). However, Kazantzakis faced women as a challenge to his aims: "In the most critical spiritual moments there was a woman be-

side me (Gandria, Berlin). Maybe because my spiritual crisis explodes? in contact with women. And she is the same eternal woman with her ephemeral individual masks, with different names, races" (Prevelakis 13). They both had many lovers, they both married more than once and used to change relationships with women quickly. After the breakup of his marriage with Nancy, Durrell started a new relationship with Eve immediately after the break-up. And after Eve and although Henry Miller suggested that he should not find another mate "in too much a hurry" (Nichols 20), he fell in love with Claude-Marie. Ten years later he married the younger Ghislaine and later he met and married Françoise.

Kazantzakis also used to find and start relationships with women in quick succession: his bohemian wife Galatea Alexiou, the young and revolutionary Austrian Rahel Lipstein together with her group of radical friends, the Greek philosopher Elli Lambridi ("Mudita"), a well cultured German girl, Elsa Lange, the "mermaids" Varvara Nikolaevna Tamankiev and Frieda, and his lifelong companion Eleni Samiou. Galatea had the name of the artist muse and she was beautiful, intelligent, and independent. She wore pants, smoked, had several relationships with men, and wrote novels. After they married in the church of the Saint Konstantinos they moved to live in Athens. The Bohemian life which Durrell had with Nancy corresponds to Kazantzakis life with Galatea. Money was tight for both couples. Nichols informs us that "the relationship between himself and his well-bred artistic woman (Nancy) deteriorated further (when they came to Paris and its brothels) ... and Durrell did not help the situation" (16). The same attitude is seen in Galatea and Nikos as he does not try to hide that he is seeing other women and when he meets Eleni it becomes clear that Galatea belongs to the past. Kazantzakis's relationship with Eleni is different for she accepts and loves the other women in his life and they did not get married until 1945, nineteen years after they started their relationship and did so just in order to get a visa to go to the U.S.A.

In their life and work both writers seem to be attracted to stronger women who are able to take care of them. The last days and months of his life, Durrell was completely dependent on his last wife Françoise, a woman who was "intelligent, young, aggressive, sexual, and determined" (Nichols 24). He loved her and he was dominated by her. Their relationship resembles that of Kazantzakis's with her first wife Galatea. He would write her letters from Vienna acknowledging his incapacity to make her happy. Those letters, as Peter Hartocollis suggests "convey the impression of a man who is greatly dependent on his wife. He not only describes himself as lost without her, helpless and unhappy, thinking about her and pleading her to come and join him, but he constantly asks her to do things for him, to transact his business with editors and bankers, to find and send him money, clothes or household items. Indeed, most of the letters read like a list of wishes a child gives to his mother when she goes at shopping" (207-08). However, a significant difference between Kazantzakis and Durrell is that Kazantzakis (like many of his heroes) felt threatened by women while Durrell did not. Barbara Nikolaevna Tamankiev, for instance, was the type of the Siren woman, a temptress. She was beautiful and she offered Kazantzakis while he worked for the Greek government in repatriating Greeks from the Caucasian region to leave everything and run away with her. He rejected in a gesture that was to be repeated by many of his heroes. The Siren would remain mysterious and ephemeral, forever lost, forever his (Kazantzakis, Helen 95).

Another temptation which Durrell would not have rejected occurred in Vienna. After an evening encounter with a young woman in the darkness of a movie theatre, Kazantzakis became infected of a strange sickness which provoked a facial swelling. Dr. Wilhelm Stekel (a disciple of Jung) told him he suffered from what was once called "the ascetic's disease" (Hartocollis 207). Such anecdotes show the deep religious contradictions lived by Kazantzakis. Nevertheless, women were not always a threat to him. There is in this sense a revealing testimony from Kazantzakis concerning women in his life and especially the last one, Eleni: it is in the epilogue of the *Report to Greco* where he wrote that "I was fortunate in chancing to meet extraordinary women along my route. No man ever did me so much good or aided my struggle so greatly as these women –and one above all, the last ... We had good wives, yours was named Jeronima, mine Helen. ... But we did not allow women, even the dearest, to lead us astray. We did not follow their flower-strewn road, we took them with us. No, we did not take them, these dauntless companions followed our ascents of their own free will" (476).

In conclusion, for Durrell as for Kazantzakis male-female relationships are complicated, but gender needs each other in order to complete themselves. Man gives security to woman only when he has been fulfilled, in turn, by her. In order to become the means to man's freedom, his guide in life and his channel of wisdom she also has to be freed. Durrell therefore demands a stronger woman, a less dominant man and, as such, a new kind of couple. Kazantzakis finds deep-seated differences between men and women. The male, in accordance with his nature, searches for the open spaces of his spiritual mind. The female, on the other hand, obeys a chthonian strength that links her to the animal roots of the human being. Nevertheless, these opposite forces are equally essential to life and thus the ideal couple in Durrell corresponds with the ideal synthesis of the male and female in Kazantzakis. Durrell's relationships with women were troubled and even despotic, yet in his novels women represent the means to a man's completion. Kazantzakis was a dear friend and lover to many intelligent women, but in his work women often embody an obstacle to the proposals of their male counterparts. Durrell believed that a new biological relationship — i.e., man becoming more feminine and vice versa — could lead to a different sort of society. Kazantzakis remained a step behind aware of the incompleteness of the male and female and their needs searching for the synthesis. In sum, a comparative approach to Durrell and Kazantzakis both with regard to their biographies and their novels can change our stereotypes concerning gender identity and the role of women in both author's work and life showing unexpected parallels between their women characters.

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